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ABSTRACT

The development and extension of open learning systems in British institutions of further and higher education has given rise to a need for changes in the methods of recording student progress. Open learning systems' provision of a wide flexibility of pace so that students can extend or compress their periods of study as compared with traditional courses creates a number of accounting difficulties: (1) there is no easy measure comparable to the "student hour," which is used as the output measurement for conventional courses; (2) the nature of the contact between student and teacher does not easily align with the class contact as recognized in normal service agreements; and (3) when emphasis is placed on a student's ability to proceed at his/her own pace, it is more difficult to maintain a check on withdrawals. Primary responsibility for maintaining a check on progress rests with the course tutor, who maintains student record cards, makes reports showing which students are actively participating in the course, and tries to make contact with students who are behind in their work. Some colleges have instituted a formal inquiry process in which a letter is sent to a student substantially behind in work asking for notification of his/her intent to continue. Student counts, conducted each term, help in monitoring course operation, and establishing notional student hours, full-time student equivalents, and resource requirements. Sample record-keeping forms are included. (HB)

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Coombe Lodge
Working Paper

Information
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ENROLMENT STATISTICS IN OPEN LEARNING SYSTEMS

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J. Latcham

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1981

ENROLMENT STATISTICS IN OPEN LEARNING SYSTEMS

1. The development and extension of open learning systems gives rise to a need for changes in the methods of recording progress of open learning students. As open learning systems have developed a large variety of progress documents have been designed to maintain checks on student progress. There is also emerging a need to establish procedures for maintaining a check of students who remain active in systems where the rate of drop-out may be fairly high. Such a check is necessary because of a need to ensure that resource allocation based on calculations of student numbers and teacher case loads are not inflated by counting as 'live' students who have withdrawn completely from the course. This paper has been written mainly to provide for recording statistics for courses of the FlexiStudy type.

2. Most FlexiStudy systems provide for a wide flexibility of pace so that students can extend or compress their periods of study as compared with traditional courses. Moreover many systems provide for almost complete flexibility of entry and exit although in many cases exit will be related to the times fixed for external examinations.

3. One difficulty arises because it is frequently the practice to charge only one fee for a FlexiStudy course and yet to provide mark and comment service and tutorial facilities for as long as the student continues his course. Accounting and the provision of resources are complicated by the fact there is no easy measure in the form of the 'student hour' which has such significance in output measurement for conventional courses. The most common resolution of this issue is to use as the basis of comparison the most economical form of a conventional course leading to the same formal qualification for students with similar entry qualifications. Thus an 'O' level course might be treated as the equivalent of perhaps two hours per week for 36 weeks of one year, i.e. 72 hours. Similarly a two year 'A' level course of 2 hours per week might be regarded as having a notional duration of 144 hours. The fact that different LEAs and colleges allow widely differing hours for similar courses mitigates against standardisation but at least for recoupment and perhaps for fee purposes it may be possible for agreement to be reached on national standard hours.

4. As well as raising the issue of finding equivalents for student-hour measurements we need to account for the fact that the nature of the contact between teacher and student does not easily align with the concept of class contact as recognised in normal establishment practice and in normal conditions of service agreements. Developing practice generally favours a concept of allocating a case load of a certain number of open learning students as equivalent to an hour per week per annum

of conventional instruction or equivalent to the total teaching load of a full-time teacher. The basis of such an equivalent is discussed in IBN 6376, Birch, Cuthbert and Latcham - 'A Note on Open Learning and College Teaching Establishments'. It must be anticipated that the case load equivalent will vary from course to course and will be determined by a variety of factors such as the style of the course material, the subject matter and level and the frequency and type of course assignments.

5. The methods suggested for deriving equivalent student hours and resource equivalents for teaching hours both involve counts of student numbers. This highlights the importance of student count in a system in which wastage rates may be comparatively high. Evening only attendance is a mode which also often demonstrates high wastage rates but because evening only courses require formal registration authorities are able to close courses when regular attendance falls below a certain minimum and sometimes do so. In open learning situations where emphasis is laid upon the student's ability to proceed at his own pace it is less easy to maintain a check on withdrawals.

6. Primary responsibility for maintaining a check on progress clearly rests upon the course tutor. With this type of course the student record documents of individual students provide for the recording of the dispatch and receipt of assignments as well as for mark records and progress comments. Normally individual student record cards will be held and maintained by the course tutor. He will make regular reports which leads to a centrally held summary of student progress. Appendix A is representative of a document used for this purpose which also monitors the case load of the tutor. The records will show quite clearly which students are actively participating in the course. There will inevitably develop a situation to which there has been no recorded response from a number of students for a considerable time. Many tutors will have tried to make contact with students whose work seems to be in arrears. Such follow up may elicit clear evidence of withdrawal or continuance levels. There may be a number of cases where doubt exists. Some colleges have decided to institute a formal enquiry process in which a letter is sent to a student substantially in arrears of work asking him to notify the college if he intends to continue; he is told that unless a reply is received within a certain time he will be recorded as a withdrawal and that if he subsequently wishes to re-enter the programme he will need to re-register. The precise nature of this notification will depend upon the terms of the original enrolment. Generally colleges would be well advised not to enter into completely open-ended commitments, particularly where only a single fee is paid. In such circumstances it is better to establish some limit to the duration of college support. (for example a limit of two or three years might be placed in support for a course which would normally take only one year). While the intention is to remove pressure from the student to complete in a given time the college commitment should not be so generous as to generate later difficulties.

7. The question arises as to how frequently it is necessary to institute a formal count of students. Colleges will certainly wish to record enrolments when the formal record of student numbers is completed at the end of October. In order to provide adequate information on which to evaluate the effectiveness of the management of this type of course it is probably desirable to make a check each term. More frequent counts are likely to be impracticable.

8. Appendix B provides a suggested format for a record of student count. It is anticipated that fairly early in each term there would be a check of all students carried foward in the active category from the previous term, some will have completed the course and others will be confirmed as withdrawn. Most students enrolled since the last check will be confirmed as active although there may be some evidence of very early drop-outs. The records of students confirmed as withdrawn will be transferred to a holding store and retained for an appropriate period. The balance of active students will be recorded and presumably used as the basis for resource allocation for the following term. The final columns of the form summarise total withdrawals and completions to which will be added a summary of examination entries and successes.

9. As well as providing management information which allows for the monitoring of course operation, the student counts can be used for establishing notional student hours, full time student equivalents and resource requirements in the form of equivalent contact hours or full time equivalent posts. The precise details of the translation from recorded active students to Burnham points, full time equivalents or teaching establishment requirement will need to be agreed with the LEA.

Appendix A: Summary of Student Progress. Reproduced from National Extension College Reports Series 2, No.4, by agreement with National Extension College and Barnet College of Further Education.

Appendix B: FlexiStudy Enrolment Summary.

APPENDIX A

TUTOR ..... COURSE ..... NUMBER: ..... 19.

Students		ASSIGNMENTS A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	TUTORIALS 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Others	For Office Use Date	Assignments	Tutorials
	Date																	Date													
	Mark																														
	Date																	Date													
	Mark																														
	Date																	Date													
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FlexiStudy - Tutor Case Load Record

IBM 1482

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APPENDIX B

FlexiStudy Enrolment Summary

COLLEGE: ..... DEPARTMENT: ..... YEAR: .....

DATE		31 OCT.							28 FEB.						30 JUN.									
REF.	SUBJECT	BROUGHT FORWARD	NEW ENROLMENT	COMPLETED	WITHDRAWN	ACTIVE CONFIRMED	ACTIVE UNCONFIRMED	CARRIED FORWARD	NEW ENROLMENT	COMPLETED	WITHDRAWN	ACTIVE CONFIRMED	ACTIVE UNCONFIRMED	CARRIED FORWARD	NEW ENROLMENT	COMPLETED	WITHDRAWN	ACTIVE CONFIRMED	ACTIVE UNCONFIRMED	CARRIED FORWARD	TOTAL COMPLETIONS	TOTAL WITHDRAWALS	EXAM ENTRIES	EXAM PASSES
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y
	Note	Note 1	Note 2	Note 3	Note 4	Note 5	Note 6	Note 7	Note 2	Note 3	Note 4	Note 5	Note 8	Note 9	Note 2	Note 3	Note 4	Note 5	Note 10	Note 11	Note --	Note --	Note 12	Note 13

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Appendix B (cont.)

Note 1 The number of active students as recorded at the previous summary.

Note 2 The number of students enrolled or re-instated since the last summary.

Note 3 The number of students who have completed the course since the last summary.

Note 4 The number of students who have notified withdrawal or failed to respond to a continuance enquiry.

Note 5 The number of students who may be assumed to be active either because work has been recently submitted or because of a positive response to a continuance enquiry.

Note 6 $h = c + d - e - f - g.$

Note 7 $i = c + d - e - f.$

Note 8 $n = i + j - k - l - m.$

Note 9 $o = i + j - k - l.$

Note 10 $t = o + p - q - r - s.$

Note 11 $u = o + p - q - r.$

Note 12 $v = e + k + q.$

Note 13 $w = f + l + r.$

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